

Celebrations of Feast and Banquet by the Tughlaqid Nobles

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Sultanate period witnessed various socio-cultural functions, held on various occasions, hosted by the Sultans and the nobles. Among them feast was a formal dinner attended by the nobles, dignitaries and prominent persons of the state. Although meager but important historical and literary accounts, shed light on the feast and banquet hosted by the Tughlaq Sultans and their nobles. These feasts popularized delicacies and set cultural norms, etiquettes and dinning manners. Thus, feasts hosted by the Tughlaq Sultans and their nobles on various social, political and religious occasions were of much cultural significance.

The Tughlaqid nobles emulated the Sultans in hosting feasts. However, the feasts and banquets attended and hosted by the Tughlaqid nobles were elaborate affairs, marked by extravagance and display. Generally the nobles used to invite the dignitaries and other *Amirs* at their residences for the feast.¹ Ibn Battuta, Qazi of Delhi under Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, attended several dinners at the royal court, as well as at the residences of the nobles. Once he was invited by Malik Maqbul at his home.² Ibn Battuta's detailed account of feasts suggests that large kitchens were maintained by the Sultan and nobles and a large amount was spent on the feasts.

Besides Ibn Battuta, Shihabuddin al-Umari and Al-Qalqashandi significantly categorized the royal banquets into two types which were held at the royal palace, attended by *Maliks*, *Khans*, *Amirs* and other dignitaries.³ The first type was known as 'Private meal' and the second type was a 'Public meal'.

Ibn Battuta records the ceremonies observed at private meal in which Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq invited his chosen relatives, *Khans*, *Maliks*, and *Amirs* as well as other high dignitaries. Being the Qazi of Delhi, Ibn Battuta was present in almost all the private banquet of Sultan and noticed that dignitaries attended this banquet were not more than twenty in number. The food was served in a large Council hall to celebrate the private feast. These nobles who attended this feast

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were *amirs* of household, *Amir-i-Hajib*, *Malik* Imad-ul-Mulk Sartezi, and *Amir-i-Majlis* etc. Whenever the Sultan wished to favour or honour a noble or great *Amir*, he invited that person to this royal banquet.⁴ Similarly Isami mentions a royal feast hosted by Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq. Isami records that on the order of the Sultan, assembly hall was profusely decorated. Courtiers were ordered to sit on the left and right of the *mimbar*. Naqibs announced the feast in which the dignitaries, courtiers and common people were invited. Then the Sultan ordered Jalal Husam for oration which was preceded by the *Khutba* by Sultan himself. Thereafter guests were entertained with music and dance and then the food was served. Every chief was presented a golden plates (*khwans*) filled with varieties of items. The remaining food was distributed among the common people.⁵

However, public meal was organized with great planning and care. The food from the royal kitchen was brought out in procession preceded by the *naqibs*. The head of the *naqibs* and his deputy walked in front of them carrying a golden and silver mace respectively and entered into the banquet hall. The food was, then, placed on the ground and the accompanied *naqibs* stood in a line while their *amir* stood in front of them. Traditionally, the *Amir* of *naqibs* had to deliver a speech, praising the Sultan and then paid homage, bowing down before the Sultan in obeisance. All *naqibs* and other officials, who were present in the hall, paid their homage. As per their custom during the speech of the *amir* of *naqibs*, nobody was allowed to move or quit his place and quietly stood up at their respective places until the end of this oration. After *Amir*, another speech was followed by his deputy (*naib*) who also paid his respects which was respectfully followed by all the assemble people. It is worth mentioning that the clerks of the gates make a written report regarding the arrival of the food and the guests. Although Sultan knew this arrival, but accordingly report was delivered to the Sultan through the sons of Maliks. The Sultan, then, appointed a leading *amir* to supervise this feast and distribution of food.⁶

Ibn Battuta minutely observed the manner in which varieties of dishes were served to the guests. According to the custom of the period *Qazis*, *khatibs*, *Hakims*, *Sharifs* and chief *amirs* were assigned privileged places at this banquet, after them the rows were arranged for rest of the people. To avoid any sort of mismanagement, the seat had been allotted to every person. When all the guests sat down, the *Shurbadâr* (cup-bearers) brought candy-water in golden, silver and brass vessels. It was drunk before eating the food but after pronouncement of *Bismilâh* by the Chamberlains (*Hajib*). A set containing dishes was placed before each person. No one shared from the plate of another person. *Fuqqâ* or barely-water was served to drink at the end of the meal. Then in accordance with the Indian custom, betel and areca nuts were distributed on the trays.⁷ Finally, the chief *amir* who was supervising the feast did homage followed by all the guests and then they left the Hall.⁸ On that occasion, the Sultan fixed a number of trays of cooked food for his favourite nobles which were sent directly from the royal kitchen to their houses daily.⁹ According to the author of *Maaslik-ul-Absar*, the general meals were served at the royal palace twice a day, one in the morning and the other in the evening.¹⁰

The dishes included thin cakes of bread, roasted meat, roasted sheep, bread-cakes kneaded with ghee and filled with *Marzipan*, then covered with flour, pieces of sweetmeats in the shape of bricks, sweetmeat contained in small saucers of leather and *samusak*, a very popular dish of India at that time.¹¹ After the meal *Fuqqa* (drink) and betel were served.¹²

Regarding the feast hosted by the nobles, Ibn Battuta gives an eyewitness account. Once he attended a feast which was hosted by Khudawandzadah Qiwwamuddin. He observed the manner in which food was served to the guests at this feast. The dishes served to each person were a thin round cake or bread, the roasted meat cutting into four or six pieces, and each person was served with one piece of roasted meat. Another dish was round dough cakes, made with ghee, which was stuffed with a kind of sweet called *Sâbuniya* on top of this dough cake. A sweet cake called *Khisht* was prepared with flour, sugar and ghee. Then, meat cooked with ghee, onions and green ginger was served in large ceramic bowls. Thereafter four or six pieces of *Samusak*¹³ were served to all. *Hâshimi*, a dish of rice, cooked in ghee with Chicken was also served. Before the meals, the Chamberlain stood up and paid homage to the Sultan and all the guests followed the same. Before the meal, *Sherbet* (drink) was served in golden, silver and glass vessels. The Chamberlain loudly pronounced *Bismilâh*, signaling them to start their meal. After meal, barely-water and areca nuts were served in accordance with the customary practice of that period. Finally *Bismillâh* was again pronounced loudly by the chamberlains, which altered the guests. Thus they all stood up and paid homage to the Sultan before leaving the place.¹⁴

Ibn Battuta mentions a private feast hosted by Sultan's mother at her palace. Ibn Battuta, *wazir* of the Sultan and his companions were the guests there. After offering prescribed etiquettes of paying respect and presenting gifts, the guests were commanded to sit down in an arcade of the palace. Then the food was served for them in golden vessels, called *Suyuns* and *Subuks*. Food was served in two rows of two tables and chief of the guests was allotted prominent place on each table. Before proceeding to the tables, homage was paid by chamberlains (*Hajibs*) and *Naqibs*. Then the guests also did the same. Here too, *Sherbet* (drink) was brought first. As per custom, the chamberlain called out *Bismillâh* and then the guests start eating. After food, as usual, the barley-water and betel leaves were served. In the end, all guests were given silken robes of honour and other gifts.¹⁵ During one of the voyages of Ibn Battuta when he was accompanied with the governor of Sindh Ala-ul-Mulk, meals were served to them with music and songs.¹⁶

Thus the feasts and banquets were important features of the socio-cultural life of the Tughlaqid Sultans and the nobles. These feasts were lavish and a huge amount was spent on them. Numerous kinds of rich dishes were served in a prescribed manner. Some kind of drink was offered before and after the meal with betel leaves. The dishes were served according to the ranks and the positions of the invited guests. To conclude, feasts were a restive feature of the court culture in the Tughlaq period. These events were celebrated with great gaiety and were sources of fun

and entertainment for the ruling classes. At the same time, they also served to strengthen the bonds between the rulers and the ruling aristocracy, bringing them together. While doing so, the rituals and ceremonies that were followed on these occasions legitimated imperial authority and reinforced the hierarchies in the court culture.

References:

- 1 Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Hindi tr. S.A.A. Rizvi, *Tughlaq Kalin Bharat* (1320-1351 A.D.), Part I, Aligarh, 2007, p. 247.
- 2 Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta (AD 1325-1354)*, Eng. Tr. H.A.R. Gibb, Vol. III, Delhi, 1993, pp. 742, 747.
- 3 *Masalik-ul-Absar fil-Mamalik-ul-Amsar*, Eng. tr. Siddiqui, in *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi*, Delhi, 1992, p. 120; Al-Qalqashandi, *Subh-ul-A'sh'*, Eng. tr. Otto Spies, *An Arab Account of India in the 14th Century*, (Being a translation of the chapters on India), Aligarh, 1935, p. 72.
- 4 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Vol. III, p. 669; Sometimes Sultan wished to honour one of those present, he took a plate in his hand, and put piece of bread in it and gave it to him. And, the person who received it, paid homage to the Sultan with prescribed etiquettes. While sometimes, Sultan sends a portion of meal to a person who was not present in the hall. See, S. A. Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, Calcutta, 1969, p. 75; Ishwari Prasad, *Qaranuh Turks in India*, Allahabad, 1936, pp. 302-303; K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, Delhi, 1971, pp. 227-228; I. H. Siddiqui, *Food Dishes and Catering Profession in pre-Mughal India*, *Islamic Culture*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1985, p. 126.
- 5 Isami, *Futuh-us-salatin*, Ed. A.S.Usha, Madras, 1948, pp. 433-434
- 6 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Vol. III, pp. 669-670; Rashid, *Society and Culture*, p. 75.
- 7 Ibn Battuta describes the rituals that were followed during formal meals. He tells us that when the guest finished eating, a cradle in the shape of container (with four legs and upper part woven of palm fiber) was placed in front of the honored guests. Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, vol. III, pp. 435-437; 670-671.
- 8 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Vol. III, pp. 669-671; Ishwari Prasad, *Qaranuh Turks*, pp. 302-303; Ashraf, *Life and Conditions*, pp. 227-228; Siddiqui, *Food Dishes*, p. 126.
- 9 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Vol. III, pp. 680-681
- 10 *Masalik*, Eng. tr. Siddiqui, p. 59
- 11 Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, Vol. III, p. 670
- 12 Ibid.; Isami, *Futuh-us-Salatin*, pp. 481-482
- 13 *Samusak* was prepared with hashed meat and cooked with almonds, walnuts, pistachios, onions and spices, put inside a piece of thin bread, then it was fried in ghee. See, Ibn Battuta, *Travels*, vol. III, pp. 607-608.
- 14 Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 607-608; Siddiqui, *Food Dishes*, pp. 124-125.
- 15 Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 736-737.
- 16 Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 601-602.

